

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) An encoding device, comprising:

generating means for generating a header to which reference is made as needed during decoding;

encoding means for encoding the header generated by the generating means and an input image signal, respectively; and

outputting means for multiplexing the header and the image signal encoded by the encoding means and outputting a bitstream, wherein

the generating means generates the header containing buffer characteristic information about buffering during decoding of the bitstream, and the buffer characteristic information contains all of a minimum bit rate R_{min} , a minimum decoder buffer size B_{min} , and a minimum delay amount F_{min} , which are decodable during decoding of the bitstream, wherein R_{min} , B_{min} , and F_{min} are used to generate a characteristic curve that is used to determine whether the bitstream is decodable at a decoding device.

2-5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently Amended) An encoding method, comprising:

generating a header to which reference is made as needed during decoding;

encoding the header generated in the generating step and an input image signal, respectively; and

multiplexing the header and the image signal encoded in the encoding step and outputting a bitstream, wherein

the generating step generates the header containing buffer characteristic information about buffering during decoding of the bitstream, and the buffer characteristic information contains all of a minimum bit rate R_{\min} , a minimum decoder buffer size B_{\min} , and a minimum delay amount F_{\min} , which are decodable during decoding of the bitstream, wherein R_{\min} , B_{\min} , and F_{\min} are used to generate a characteristic curve that is used to determine whether the bitstream is decodable at a decoding device.

7. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium ~~storing~~ embedded with a program which when executed by a computer causes the computer to perform the steps of:
generating a header to which reference is made as needed during decoding;
encoding the header generated in the generating step and an input image signal, respectively; and
multiplexing the header and the image signal encoded in the encoding step and outputting a bitstream, wherein

the generating step generates the header containing buffer characteristic information about buffering during decoding of the bitstream, and the buffer characteristic information contains all of a minimum bit rate R_{\min} , a minimum decoder buffer size B_{\min} , and a minimum delay amount F_{\min} , which are decodable during decoding of the bitstream, wherein R_{\min} , B_{\min} , and F_{\min} are used to generate a characteristic curve that is used to determine whether the bitstream is decodable at a decoding device.

8-19. (Canceled)